

THE EVANS YEARS 1983-1991

A VERY BRITISH REVOLUTION

It is wonderful to be part of a success story, and Sixth Form Colleges were the great success story of reorganisation. At KGV we knew the College was a success by that most potent of all indicators, consumer demand. The students came from all quarters - Lancashire, Sefton and a host of independent schools. This was not a welcome development for some. The culture of LEA control of admissions was still strong, and the first week in every September was spent putting the individual case for admission of numerous students. The curriculum broadened and, with its subject combinations, KGV was in the top 10% of colleges for academic success, despite the worst staffing ratio in the country. Its outstanding track record was well known to the great universities, who rapidly learned to rely on our academic judgements.

I came to KGV in 1983 as the last remnants of the former grammar school structure disappeared: physically the old building was demolished, there was complete freedom over dress - tweed jackets went out and denims came in - and 50% of the inhabitants, both staff and students, were now female. But the best of the old culture survived. The staff were dedicated to the idea of the education of the whole person. Extra-curricular life flourished, the musical and dramatic output was outstanding, business and political activity was vibrant, and outward bound and sporting dedication was obvious. Sports Day and the

Christmas Carol Service survived. Despite a 50% annual turnover of students, the sense of community remained strong. They returned annually to the Christmas reunion and many joined the Old Georgians. The College Association remained active and, thankfully, supplemented our meagre resources. Thanks to them we had our first IT centre. Unbelievably, until then our first computers were housed in a windowless cupboard!

The vitality and self-confidence of KGV was doubly pleasing when contrasted with the traumatic state of education nationally. These were the years of industrial action. It is never pleasant to realise that society places little value on your contribution. The decline in morale was in marked contrast to the optimism with which most of the staff had started their careers. The insecurity was exacerbated by the activities of a strong local pressure group that wished to close the college and create a tertiary institution. Tertiary Colleges were the inspiration of activists who believed that the structure of educational institutions was more important than what went on in them. They remained the flavour of the times until the 1988 legislation impeded reorganisation possibilities.

At the end of a stormy passage, two new revolutions awaited us in the late 1980s. Trade union rights over pay and conditions were withdrawn and, in place of the old professional commitment, staff were required to observe a detailed list of duties. Then, in 1988, we were liberated by local management of schools and control of our own budget. Faced with the demands of the required new computer skills, I felt rather like a medieval monk coming to terms with the revolution wrought by Guggenheim's printing press. Fortunately, there were some very immediate rewards. With spare cash we could actually start some much-needed decoration, and the boys' loos were our first priority! We could actually design our own brochure and pay for the first video to express the individuality of our college. With some budgetary manipulation, we appointed our first professional librarian and extended the student recreational area.

Largely for personal reasons I had to retire in 1991, but the images of those productive years are quite vivid: the end-of-year assemblies which equalled anything professional sport could offer, Long Rigg in its Howgills setting glowing with autumn colours, the clash of Titans at annual professional conferences, the newspaper reports of our students' tea with Mrs Thatcher at Number 10, two students singing the aria from 'La Traviata', the heroine in 'Sweet Charity' coiling a nubile and shapely leg around the Deputy Education Director, and the inevitable emotional dramas associated with the activities of 600 teenagers. Like the Abbé Sieyes I can say 'J'ai vécu', but I can say more. Governors, staff and students together masterminded a highly successful revolution, but it was a very British revolution in which the values of the old regime survived and enriched the new.

Geraldine Evans, KGV Principal 1983-91

REFLECTIONS OF A VICE-PRINCIPAL

Back in 1983, as I pondered my application for the job of vice-principal at KGV, the staffroom guru at my previous school gave me his advice. It was cogent if simplistic. 'Don't take it. It can't be viable. The only reason that people go to Southport is to retire. There aren't enough young people for a decent football team, let alone a Sixth Form College.' Well he was wrong, or at least he was wrong about the Sixth Form College. I disregarded his advice and, in accepting a job at KGV, made one of the best decisions of my life. During the fourteen years that I was here, his prophecy was disproved as the college doubled in size to over 1,000, and more than 5,000 passed through.

I was involved both with admissions and the Old Georgians' Association and was, therefore, well placed to watch those students progress from High School to Higher Education, from carefully completed college application forms in neat block capitals to a final illegible application to join the Old Georgians by an unsigned post-dated cheque. If they learned nothing else, those students certainly learned survival skills.

They (or rather you, since I hope many former members of the college will be reading this anniversary newsletter) have provided many memories, for there were many memorable individuals - the Great and the Good (Chairs of College Council and Mason-Dixon Award Winners), those whom I taught and got to know best, and those who were legends both in the staffroom and the cafeteria. Where are they now? Well, like it or not, some will now be approaching middle age. Many may have achieved modest respectability as brain surgeons, barristers or university professors, but a favoured few have gone on to real success as stand-up comedians and e-commerce entrepreneurs, using skills developed in those formative years between the ages of 16 and 18.

Those sixth form college pioneers of the early '80s are now a whole generation away. They look out of college photographs with an air of apparent respectability - jackets and ties for boys, skirts and blouses for girls, even, if I remember rightly, a college brooch! But behind that superficial conformity, their individuality flourished and their independence grew. Memory suggests that the pressures on both the students and the staff were not quite what they are today. There seemed to be a bit more time and, with it, a bit more tolerance. The pressures of peer group and media were rather easier to resist. Today young people are, in every sense, tested to the full. Those who come through are impressive, but there are more casualties and much more support is needed.

This is where continuity and stability matter, and they are hard to find in a sixth form college where students have to arrive, settle in, make crucial career decisions and try to learn something, all within a period of 20 months. It is all very different from the five or seven years in a stable year group of perhaps 90 that was the norm at KGV in the first fifty years of its existence. Continuity now depends on the staff, and this has been one of KGV's greatest strengths. I have too many friends to risk offending people, either by naming them or by

not naming them, but a general salute, both to the fifteen or so members of the '20 years and more' club for sticking it out, and to all the more recent arrivals for not letting them have it entirely their own way. It is a good mix and it makes for a good college.

Stability is also provided by being part of the local community, and KGV is deeply embedded in Southport and its hinterland, even though those slightly mumbled initials no longer carry quite the same range of references as they did in pre-Glasnost days. Students and ex-students turn up everywhere from Tesco to the Governing Body, and from the House of Commons to other, more local clubs. We have friends in high places, a point made when I was discussing admissions with a family new to the area. The door opened and a member of the office staff said 'It's the Prince of Wales on the phone'. 'Say I'll phone back on Monday' I replied. My visitors looked impressed if a little shocked at my impertinence, but I knew that the Banqueting Manager would need even more assurances that all would be well before we got the go-ahead for the first ever student prom.

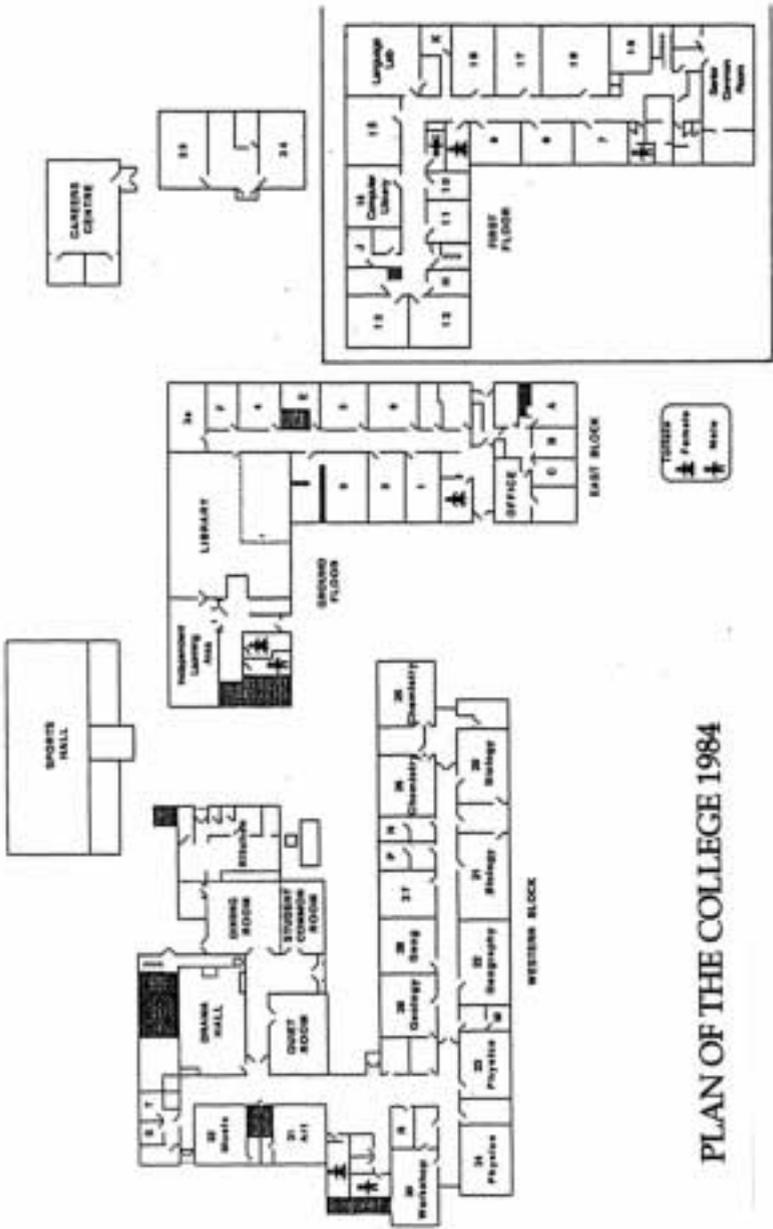
Over the past 20 years the college has watched its students grow up, but it has also grown up itself. Back in 1983 it was a sturdy youngster, but it was still tied to Sefton's apron strings. By 1990, some Sefton officials may have detected a greater striving for independence, but probably neither they nor we expected the dramatic parting of the ways brought about by government legislation, and our incorporation as an independent college with the freedom to sink or swim. There was no going back to mummy! We had to fend for ourselves in a harsh and predatory world - we did not have the luxury of a year out and, at times, it seemed more like the sharp shock of national service than the fun-packed life at 'uni'. But, as everybody told us, it was 'character building' and 'good for the soul'. It leads to maturity and, hopefully, to prosperity, and this 75th anniversary is one that can be celebrated, rather than just marked.

Roger Mitchell, Vice-Principal of KGV 1983-87

COLLEGE COUNCIL'S POWERLESSNESS

The other week I was having one of my many arguments with a 'busybody', who patiently told me the reason why the College Council is a complete waste of time. 'What has it ever done for me?' he asked. My reply was 'What did you want it to do?' 'Nothing, but that's not the point,' he said. Well I'm sorry, but that is just the point because, if you never bother to raise something or, indeed, raise anything at the College, why criticise the Council for doing nothing? Perhaps you have had nothing done through the Council, but there are many people who have.

The Council will never produce a revolution in College, because it is not designed to. It is elected for the purpose of coordinating College committees and hearing the views of the Tutor Groups through their reps.



My greatest disappointment, however, was the Governors' refusal to allow girls the option of wearing trousers, after the majority of them had decided they would like to. College Council ran the ballot and backed its decision. Mrs Evans had to consult the Governors who rejected it without even asking why we had proposed it. The people said to me 'Council is powerless. You can't even get a result over a minor thing like that'. I could only dumbly smile and nod.

Philip Pitt, KGV College Council Chairman 1984-85

'CIDER WITH ROSIE'

About two months ago, on Tuesday to Thursday March 26th to 28th 1985, the usual deathly silence and stillness that one would associate with a college at 7.30 pm was rudely interrupted by over 300 people - parents, students, relatives, friends - who flocked to see the widely publicised 'Cider with Rosie'. Although only the best would be expected from a KGV production, all those attending were in for a pleasant surprise; the best was exceeded by far.

The story was about Laurie Lee, a young boy being brought up in a large family in post-war years, and told of his experiences. The family was headed by the mother, played impressively by Alison Cox, and the rest of the family featured Alison Barker, Jane Wallace and Fern Ramsbottom as the three sisters, Tim Mercer, Robert Rimmer and Philip Davies as the brothers Harold, Jack and Tony, and Garrett Doyle who took the main part of the young Laurie Lee, affectionately nicknamed 'Loll'. Garrett gave a vivid display of a boy growing up, and obviously had had first-hand experience of being a drunken seven-year-old, as this part was played particularly effectively.

The play progressed smoothly, with many clever and amusing scenes, although I do feel that the storyline was somewhat lacking - there was no definite beginning and no real end - but this did not marr my overall enjoyment. I would like to congratulate Ruth Holloway on her part as Granny Fallon for making one of the most hilarious scenes in this play, and John Baldwin for the excellence of his linking narration. Another success for Wendy Weldon - well done all!

Mark Yaffé, A3 1984-86

ANOTHER YEAR GOES BY

I don't know if it's my imagination or what, but it seems that the nine months from last September have just flown by. Only yesterday, it seems, when the new students from a variety of Sefton schools gathering tentatively in a new environment, which we all know as KGV College, were no doubt wondering what prospects were in store for them. Now, nine months on, the 'First Years' are firmly-established and mature residents of King George V.

Many students have earned distinction in their various projects and enterprises, and I would like to congratulate them for their many achievements. This summer, as usual, I shall be sorry to see my 'favourites' leave, and I have been touched by the small number of kind students who have asked me to sign their books of remembrance, which I think is an excellent idea. I am sure they will look back with affection on the happy time they spent here at College.

Finally, can I say just a few words of gratitude to one or two people who have given many hours of selfless devotion to the life of KGV? Firstly Mr Gale, who will step down as sports master. He has kept the Sports Hall a hive of activity with all the different games it offers. He often tells me of the days when KGV Grammar School had an enviable reputation for Rugby.

Also Mr Clough, who has taught Classics for more years than he cares to remember. Both Mr Gale and Mr Clough are gentlemen in the true sense, and between them they have given their time to youngsters for seventy years. Their loyalty is without peer. Not forgetting Mrs Price who, although retiring this term, will happily be returning part time in September.

KGV will surely miss them, and I hope you will join with me in wishing them a happy retirement. I hope you all have a good summer and I wish good luck to everyone going on to university.

Mike Whittaker, Assistant Caretaker (1990)

METAMORPHOSIS

Geraldine Evans presided over the transformation of a KGV, that was still essentially a large and very successful grammar school sixth form, to a comprehensive Sixth Form College, without sacrificing the ethos and the quality of the education offered. An experienced principal already, with a sharp mind and a good political nose, she understood the realities of the education world and was prepared to fight for her beliefs. Perhaps the greatest service she gave was the ensuring of KGV's survival. Writing in 2000, it is easy to forget the uncertainty surrounding the College's future in the 1980s, with the real threat of a merger to form a tertiary college. With astuteness and tenacity, she saw that KGV had to avoid isolation and keep abreast of new developments in order to survive and succeed.

Change was firmly on the agenda. Students rejoiced when the dress regulations were relaxed, and staff smokers were 'persuaded' to accept the the college should be a smoke-free zone (and it still is for staff!) The pace of change was rapid. The infamous Baker Days were used to enhance staff development, hitherto forced onto the back burner in the scramble for reorganisation. There were visiting principals, trainers, in-house sessions on initiatives such as CPVE, and discussions about the International Baccalaureate. Staff were actively encouraged to go on specialist courses, and some gained new qualifications. With her political contacts in the SDP, Geraldine invited speakers like Charles Kennedy (who arrived with toothache in a snowstorm), Shirley Williams, MP

for Crosby, and Hilary Armstrong to update and enlighten students and parents. The students benefited from new courses in Personal & Social Education, while General Studies was revamped and the pastoral system improved. The House of Commons Select Committee on Education made a visit to KGV College in 1990.

At her interview for the post of KGV Principal, Geraldine had surveyed the other candidates and observed 'There aren't many women here, are there?' This heralded a new emphasis on Equal Opportunities. Inevitably, while the old school was still on site, there was a predominantly male ethos. Almost all the key posts were held by men or, in the case of student societies, by boys. Geraldine created new posts, such as Faculty Tutors, appointed the first College Counsellor and the first Equal Opportunities Co-ordinator in Sefton. More part-time staff were recruited and the number of women increased. Gradually, girls outnumbered boys, and the ambience of the college changed.

Geraldine pioneered many of the features which characterise KGV today. She anticipated the changes in teaching and learning, and planned the first Learning Resource Centre, much of which was funded by TVEI. Disabled access was facilitated by the building of ramps and toilets and, in 1990, Special Needs became part of Equal Opportunities. Records of Achievement replaced the old reports just before her retirement, and she commenced discussions about GNVQ. Since then the college has won quality awards for all of these, as well as recognition as a centre of excellence. When Geraldine Evans retired in 1991, she left a thriving, over-subscribed college, well able to cope with the enormous educational challenges of the last decade of the twentieth century

Pauline Collier, KGV Assistant Principal

INTERREGNUM

There was a gap of one term between the departure of Geraldine Evans in the Summer of 1991 and the arrival of Hilary Anslow in the January of 1992. During that period, Roger Mitchell became Acting Principal of KGV, a position he had held once before. Roger performed his role with customary wisdom, warmth and skill, building on the high esteem in which his colleagues held him. Very few in the history of KGV have equalled the quality of service he displayed throughout a distinguished career.

PDB